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Colby: Don't Squelch CIA Abroad

Congress should keep tabs on the Central Intelligence Agency but not squelch its intelligence-gathering abroad, former agency Director William E. Colby said.

Speaking last night at the University of Rochester, Colby warned that the U.S. must keep a wary eye on the world's poorer, developing nations.

Those countries will regard America's agricultural and economic wealth with increasing envy and frustration, he said.

"Some will look to political or economic weapons . . . some will look to sabotaging international institutions . . . and some will look to violence . . ." Colby said.

"As we face a future of some reckless despot building an atomic bomb in his backyard, we could send for the Marines," Colby said.

But he added that "some quiet help" to friendly people in developing countries would be better than military measures.

"We should only use intelligence operations rarely, and use them well," he said. "Intelligence activity should not be taken out of our national armory."

Colby, now a Washington, D.C., lawyer, received about \$2,000 for his appearance. His topic was "The New Intelligence." He recapped spying history and concluded the CIA is necessary.

But he said CIA experience in the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal showed there must be reins on the agency.

"We realize now that no part of the American government can operate outside American laws," he said.

The 58-year-old bespectacled man in a gray suit defended the CIA's "secret assistance" in countries such as Chile, the Philippines and Vietnam.

Those activities were carried out under direction of the president and with congressional knowledge, he said. Or, they happened under a Congress that didn't want to know about them. Colby, appointed CIA director in 1973, oversaw the agency until George Bush replaced him in 1975.

Now, the United States has permanent congressional committees on intelligence activities. The agency will get supervision it didn't have in the past, he said.

"Let's control the CIA. Let's not blind ourselves," he said. He advocated opening the agency to more public scrutiny and "replacing old, fuzzy laws" with specific guidelines.

Colby joined the CIA in 1950 when the Korean war broke out. He was appointed head of the Far East division in 1962. Two years later he oversaw the establishment of the Vietnam counterterror program, which used kidnapping, intimidation and assassination against the Communist leadership.

He started Operation Phoenix in 1967 to coordinate American and Vietnamese attacks on the Communist infrastructure. It has been reported that more than 20,000 suspected Communists were killed in the operation's first 2½ years.

Students questioned him closely on Vietnam and assassinations.

"No foreign leader was ever assassinated by the CIA," Colby said. "Not that we didn't try," he quickly added, citing the case of Cuba's Fidel Castro.